

# A JOHNSONIAN NEWS LETTER

Vol. II, No. 2 Address communications to J. L. Clifford April, 1942  
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Penna.

## MLA SCHEDULE FOR 1942

Because of congestion in Washington the annual meetings of the association will be held instead at the Hotel Astor in Times Square, New York City, from December 29-31.

As may be seen from the program of sessions printed in the March P.M.L.A., the request of groups VII and VIII has been granted, and both meetings are scheduled for the same day. This will make it possible to hold our 18th century luncheon between the two sessions. Does anyone have a good suggestion of a mid-century menu to whet the appetites of both Pope and Dr. Johnson?

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## SEVENTEENTH CENTURY NEWS LETTER

We whole-heartedly welcome the appearance of the first issue of a brother publication--A Seventeenth Century News Letter. Although we like to believe that ours was the inspiration for this new venture, we cannot but envy its attractive format and professional appearance. Many congratulations to the chairman, Jim Osborn (Yale), and to J. Milton French (Rutgers) and J. G. McManaway (Folger) his co-editors! They are certainly doing a splendid job!

Any of our readers who would like to receive a copy of the first number, just issued, should write to J. Milton French, Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. Names of other 17th century scholars who might be interested will also be welcomed.

In the first number may be found a report of the present status of Donald Wing's 1641-1700 continuation of the Short Title Catalogue. Following this, among regular features which show promise of being continually interesting are

"Milton Notes," "Dryden News," and "Rare Books and Manuscripts." Personal news, research queries, and announcements are included in this interesting messenger with the flying Mercuries at the masthead.

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## NEWS FROM ENGLAND

H.W. Bromhead, the Streatham antiquarian, writes of the Annual General Meeting of the Johnson Society of London, which was held March 7. At that time the resignation of Frederick Vernon as Hon. Secretary was reluctantly accepted.

Those of us who have known of the devoted service rendered by Frederick Vernon to the society deeply regret his decision to retire. For years to many of us he and the Johnson Society have been almost synonymous. It is he who has arranged programs and kept in touch with members everywhere; it is he who has arranged the yearly publication of the speeches at the dinner meetings; it is he who has been active in issuing the interesting New Rambler, a few copies of which have reached these shores. But at eighty-one he may be pardoned for wishing to pass on the responsibility to a younger man, Oliver D. Savage. One thing is certain, however; Frederick Vernon will remain one of the most loyal Johnsonians anywhere.

Our readers may be interested to know that John Butt, the general editor of the Twickenham edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, has left his old post at Bedford College (now moved to Cambridge) and is working in a government office in Birmingham. He writes that he is kept pretty busy, but

still manages to "examine an occasional thesis and write an occasional review and look through the proofs of James Sutherland's edition of the Dunciad which should be published in the spring."

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#### FOLGER REOPENS

Since there have been a number of conflicting rumors about the plans of the Folger Library in Washington, D.C. during the emergency, it may be worthwhile to give the following report direct from J.G. McManaway. The library is definitely open for business, and, although most of the earlier treasures have been placed in storage, some of the collections after 1700 are still available to scholars. Playbills, prints, and engravings are untouched.

Giles Dawson, the Reference Librarian, had arranged a fine Garrick exhibit just before the Exodus of rarities, and as late as last month some of the items were still being shown. Included were Garrick's prompt book of Hamlet; his marriage certificate; his large paper copy of Rowe's Shakespeare (1709); the play bill announcing Garrick's first appearance -- under the name, "Mr. Lyddall" -- as Captain Duretete in The Inconstant on 21 July 1741. Accompanying this is an engraving of the Theatre in Tankard Street, Ipswich, where he appeared. Numerous letters and other documents also are displayed.

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In the issue of June, last year, as some of you may remember, we printed an interesting account of the burning of Dr. Johnson in effigy by a mob at Salem in 1775. The story had been turned up by R. T. Halsey of New Haven, during his researches in the 18th century. We have received word of his tragic death in an automobile accident, and thus we will not be able to

count again on his kindly interest and help.

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#### QUERIES

L. H. Butterfield (F. & M.), after answering one recent query, sends in two others of his own:

"The first concerns John Almon (1737-1805), London bookseller, compiler of numerous valuable collections of documents, and biographer of John Wilkes. Being virtually official publisher to the Whig opposition in the 1760's and 1770's, he brought out many of the most inflammatory poems, satires, and pamphlets directed against the government during the Revolution, including William Mason's and Thomas Day's satirical poems and London reprints of Trumbull's M'Fingal and (no less) Paine's Common Sense.

"A fascinating story of Whig Propaganda on both sides of the Atlantic could be told if Almon's papers could be located. Can any readers furnish information regarding Almon MSS. (besides those in the British Museum) or regarding his American connections, which were evidently extensive?

The second query relates to one of Almon's poets, the author of a long series of vigorous pro-American satires between 1775 and 1783. The best known of these is Lord Ch(atha)m's Prophecy, An Ode; Addressed to Lieutenant General G(ake) ..., 1776. The others, attributed to the author of the Ode, appear in various miscellanies edited or published by Almon.

"Some evidence suggests that John Townshend (1757-1833), a Whig wit and politician, was the author; but I am anxious to locate copies of the following miscellanies that have annotations indicating authorship: The New Foundling Hospital for Wit .... London: J. Debrett, 6 vols., 1784; and The New Foundling Hospital for Wit .... London: J. Debrett, 6 vols., 1786."



## DR. JOHNSON'S POETRY

As you may remember, in our last issue we tossed several conflicting criticisms of Dr. Johnson's poetry into the ring, hoping to stir up an interesting battle. But so far not many combatants have appeared ready to attack or defend the point of view of T. S. Eliot and others who feel that Johnson should be considered as more than a minor poet.

One correspondent, to be sure, acidly comments: "The passages you select do serve to illustrate extremes, but they are by no means representative. The anthology remarks are those of men who approach with the typical unbalance of students who have never recovered from their sophomore courses in the 19th century. And Eliot seems to me here, as elsewhere, to go astray. To suggest that Johnson surpasses Dryden seems sheer madness. . . . you can't get a major poet out of two satires and one effective prologue."

Perhaps many readers have felt disinclined to enter the fray because they agree with what Fred Pottle (Yale) says in his superb little book, The Idiom of Poetry--that on the whole it would be better if we refrained oftener from making quantitative judgments on the rank of various poets. And certainly he is right. It is futile to say that Johnson was a greater poet than "so-and-so", or a lesser than "what's his name." But since Johnson's poetry has so often been ignored, we have felt it might be worthwhile to draw out some forthright expressions of opinion.

Many good critics in the past, we must remember, have found inspiration and delight in the Great Cham's satires. To quote from Pottle (p. 15):

"Walter Scott said he had more pleasure in reading Johnson's London and Vanity of Human Wishes 'than any other poetical composition he could mention,' and remarks in his sketch of Johnson's life that 'the deep and pathetic moral-

ity of The Vanity of Human Wishes has often extracted tears from those whose eyes wander dry over pages professedly sentimental'."

So what about it? Haven't others of you definite convictions about the effectiveness of Johnson's verse? Send in your opinions -- bitter, petulant, serene, or "what you will!"

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In his recent book, Poetry as a Means of Grace, Charles G. Osgood (Princeton) has a chapter on Dr. Johnson that all good Johnsonians might well read once a year for inspiration and delight. We cannot resist quoting the last paragraph:

"It is easy to make fun of Johnson, or at least to regard him only as a picturesque source of amusement. It is easy to take unreasonable offense at his forthrightness, his fixity of opinion, to misconstrue his intolerance, and to make no proper allowance for what he called the 'anfractuosities' of his mind. It is easy to sentimentalize about him -- a treatment which he would have resented most of all. Resist such false impressions till you know him. Then they will no longer trouble you. For you will find him a loyal and understanding and manly friend, one whose salutary words keep ringing in your ear, one whose fortitude and wisdom reinforce your own, one in whose heart and mind there was room for all sorts and conditions of men, one who through deeper trials and loneliness than most of us know kept a simple faith, without mystic transports, which transcended and controlled all his multifarious knowledge and experience, and helps to clear your vision of the mists and vapors that drift and eddy athwart it in days like these."

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## A FORTHCOMING WORK ON JOHNSON

Our readers will be interested to know that the well-known critic, Joseph Wood Krutch, is at work on

what he calls "a rather long book" about Dr. Johnson, at least semi-popular in character, in which the emphasis will be on the great man's character and opinions. Krutch describes his purpose:

"I hope to take advantage of all the important specialized work which has been done on Johnson, but I would not describe it as primarily a work of scholarship. I would like if possible to stress the power, originality and humor of Johnson, and in that way to do him more justice than the average man who thinks of him chiefly as a prejudiced eccentric, is inclined to do him."

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#### FROM CHINA TO PERU

J. R. Moore (Indiana) sends on the following comments:

"In the phrase 'from China to Peru' the reference to China is obvious enough; China was the best known remote country in the world, and Johnson recognized visiting the Wall of China as a noble achievement for a traveller. But (quite aside from literary analogues of the phrase) four special factors may help to explain the allusion to Peru.

"(1) Peru was an ideal word to tag the end of a couplet, and could be so used regardless of the meaning. Thus Defoe (*Jure Divino*, XII) called Credit 'sister to Potosi and Peru,' although Potosi was itself included in Peru.

"(2) Peru was known for the exotic -- Peruvian bark, Peruvian mines, the tyranny of the Incas and Conquistadors. It was the strange land of 'Down Under'.

"(3) In the first half of the 18th century the boundaries of South American vice-royalties were frequently shifted; but Peru was popularly supposed to include everything on the Pacific coast from the Equator to 25 degrees South (including modern Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and a considerable part of Chile). Thus Peru was the one big country at the remote

southwestern end of the inhabited world, corresponding to China at the northeast.

"(4) The French geodetical expedition to Peru (now Ecuador) in 1735-43, to measure the latitude as compared with that in Lapland, had made Peru famous as a remote part of the world. The French measure used in that expedition, the toise of Peru, became the standard for geodetical surveys of the period. In 1749 a poet did not need Johnson's personal interest in geography to have the name of Peru on the tip of his pen."

Any other remarks on the use of the phrase?

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Nearly everyone knows that the late A. Edward Newton lived spiritually in the 18th century, but that he was actually alive then is first revealed by an item in the last catalogue of the American Autograph Shop (Jan. 1942, item 129):

"Newton, A. Edward. L.S. folio, very of the Revolution. A.L.S. Folio, with address leaf to John Hudson in Baltimore. Very full page. Phila., 1779. Entirely about building of ships, and requirements so they can be used by the Continental Navy. HIS WAR LETTERS VERY RARE. \$13.75."

Some Baconian of the future who chances to come across this item will doubtless use it as a peg on which to hang all kinds of interesting theories.

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How many of you remember that one can find predictions of devices to purify air in submarines, incendiary bombs, and aerial combats in that little read 18th century satire, *The Scribleriad*? One amusing episode in particular may be found reprinted in R. D. Altick's recent study of Richard Owen Cambridge (pp. 110-12). Here we can read of a fierce struggle in the air by a German and a Briton long before the advent of Hitler.